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Crossing the line in the sand: regional officials, monopolisation of state power and ‘rebellion’. The case of Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu in Cyprus, 1685-1690

Marios Hadjianastasis*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine centre-periphery relations and issues of state control in Ottoman provinces in the seventeenth century, as these are reflected in the case of Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu in Ottoman Cyprus. Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu rose to prominence in the 1680s and dominated the island for a period of five to seven years, until 1690. His behaviour and actions, and the way the Sublime Porte dealt with them, represent a useful example of how power was negotiated between the centre and the periphery. Moreover, it demonstrates how rebellion terminology had a particular meaning for contemporary historians and officials, but must be used with caution by the analysts of today. This paper focuses on our handling of this phenomenon, and initiates a discussion on terminology and meaning.

Keywords

Rebellion, state control, provincial elites, Ottoman Cyprus, Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu.

“Things were in great disorder on the Isle of Cyprus, though otherwise divided into several Factions, all agreeing in their discontent against their Bassa, who had been obliged for his own security to retire into the Castle of Nicosia”.¹

The concept of rebellion in the Ottoman empire has become almost synonymous with its period of ‘decline’, and is one of the reasons put forward by the proponents of the decline paradigm in their search for the roots of the empire’s eventual demise. As historians viewed history through the tinted glass of the empire’s dissolution in the twentieth century, and, perhaps with a degree of regret in some cases, the forensic examination of the reasons for this demise began in earnest.² Rebellion, insubordination and unrest in the provinces, alongside the corruption of the Janissary corps which had abandoned its non-hereditary ways, have been cited as reasons for decline. This was supposedly caused by the ‘weakening’ of the state and the ‘decadence’ into which Ottoman sultans allowed themselves to fall - meaning lack of control over the empire. In recent years, historians have rejected the decline thesis, initially in favour of the milder decentralisation paradigm, which was in turn

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¹ *London Gazette*, April 2, 1688 - April 5, 1688; Issue 2335; (<http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/17th--18th-century-burney-collection-newspapers-.aspx>), accessed through The Burney Collection on Gale Cengage on 11 March 2011.

² For examples of decline theory see Lewis, Bernard, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). İnalcık’s *Classical Age* reinforced the periodisation of Ottoman history into the ‘classical’ era and the subsequent period of ‘decline’. İnalcık, Halil, *The Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age, 1300-1600*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973). For a critique of the decline paradigm, see Quataert, Donald, “Ottoman history writing and changing attitudes towards the notion of “decline””, *History Compass*, 1, (2003), 1-9 [online journal <http://www.blackwell-compass.com/subject/history/>], accessed on 1 April 2011.

reinterpreted in favour of a less rigid and suggestive approach which stresses the renegotiation of power between the state and provincial groups and notables.

The term ‘rebellion’ itself, dangerously overloaded with imagery, was liberally applied by modern historians to characterise diverse cases ranging from garrison mutinies to disputes with regional officials. This paper aims to examine one such case, that of Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu of Cyprus in the late-seventeenth century. Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu, one of the *ağas* of Nicosia, managed to monopolise state power and authority on the island for a period of at least five years, from 1685 to 1690.³ He was eventually branded a ‘bandit’ and a ‘rebel’, and caused the intervention of the Porte on two occasions. He was eventually captured and executed in 1690 by Çifutoğlu Ahmed Paşa and his troops. Historians have treated this incident as a rebellion, based mainly on contemporary histories and accounts. However, when examined closely, this case raises serious questions about our handling of terms that are not immediately suited to this particular incident, or indeed elsewhere where the terminology of rebellion is applied. Going beyond a simple acceptance of Ottoman terminology and monochrome perception, this paper aims to expose the complex and fascinating socioeconomic and political fermentations in this period of the island’s history and offer a different perspective in dealing with instances of breakdown of state control.⁴ In addition, the paper will discuss issues of negotiation of authority, control and legitimacy, in an attempt to offer alternatives to the rigid branding of such phenomena as rebellions by contemporary and modern historians alike.

The subject of rebellion in the Ottoman empire has been dealt with extensively. Karen Barkey’s often-criticised work examines issues of centre and periphery, sultanic control and regional elites.⁵ Rifaat Abou-El-Hajj’s work on the 1703 rebellion deals with a rebellion at the very core of the empire,⁶ one which overthrew Sultan Mustafa II and put Ahmed III in his place. Virginia Aksan has worked on garrison rebellions and military mutinies,⁷ while Pamira Brummett has attempted to provide a taxonomy of Ottoman rebellions.⁸ State control and military rebellions have been the subject of various studies and collected volumes adopting a more comparative approach.⁹

³ It is generally believed that Boyacıoğlu’s rule began in 1683 and ended in 1690, perhaps as a result of Kyprianos’ treatment of the incident and his belief that it lasted seven years. There is not sufficient evidence at this stage to support the precise dating of the beginning of Boyacıoğlu’s rule as 1683. Archimandritis Kyprianos, *Ιστορία Χρονολογική της Νήσου Κύπρου* [A Chronological History of Cyprus] (Venice: N. Glykys, 1788. Reprinted in facsimile: Nicosia: Etairia Kypriakon Spoudon, 1971), pp. 310-11. This study takes as starting point of Boyacıoğlu’s ‘rule’ the year 1685, which is the first attempt on the part of the Sublime Porte to censure him.

⁴ The Boyacıoğlu incident was also examined by Stavridis, Theocharis, “Η Αποστασία του Μεχμέτ Μπογιατζόγλου” [The revolt of Mehmed Boyacıoğlu], *Επετηρίς*, 29 (2003), 115-43.

⁵ Barkey, Karen, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: the Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, N.Y., London: Cornell University Press, 1994). See Amy Singer’s review of Barkey’s *Bandits* in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995), 516-7.

⁶ Abou-El-Haj, Rifaat, *The 1703 Rebellion and the Structure of Ottoman Politics* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut Voor het Nabije Oosten, 1984).

⁷ Aksan, Virginia, “Manning a Black Sea garrison in the 18th century: Ochakov and concepts of mutiny and rebellion in the Ottoman context” in *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jane Hathaway (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002), pp. 63-71.

⁸ Brummett, Palmira, “Classifying Ottoman mutiny: the act and vision of rebellion”, *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, 2/1 (1998), 91-107.

⁹ See Hathaway, *Mutiny* and Hathaway, Jane (ed.), *Rebellion, Repression, Reinvention: Mutiny in Comparative Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2001). See also Goldstone, Jack, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern world* (Berkeley, London: University of California

Although terms such as ‘rebellion’, ‘rebel’, ‘mutiny’ and their Ottoman equivalents were used liberally during the Ottoman period to characterise people or groups who for one reason or other fell on the wrong side of legality and power struggles, the use of the same terms in modern scholarship has a pre-emptive effect on the reader as to the ideological content of the analysis. When one thinks of rebels, the images conjured often include bands of roving raiders plundering villages and torturing hapless peasants, invading courts and palaces and overthrowing sultans, raising the banner of rebellion against the central authority and its agents. Indeed, as Brummett points out, the concepts of mutiny and rebellion became very generalised in the seventeenth century, and reflected more a perceived state of affairs, as seen from above, than an accurate depiction of the situation on the ground.¹⁰ Just as Na‘ima’s explanation of sixteenth-century rebellions was written vis-à-vis an idealised past where state control was thought to be at its strongest,¹¹ modern historians of the Ottoman Empire have also projected back modern concepts of state control over society and explained rebellions as instances of breakdown of that control and indications of that retrospective (and now considered redundant) model of Ottoman decline.¹²

Moreover, we must draw a line between actual military rebellions and mutinies, and what could be perceived as the collapse of state control in Ottoman provinces. This is often seen as a result of the increasing power of local notables, whose agenda may or may not have been in conflict with the state. The branding of such incidents as rebellions by contemporary sources, and their uncritical acceptance by modern observers, leads inevitably to their study alongside garrison mutinies and of course the great Celali revolts of the early seventeenth century.¹³ This approach does not allow for a thorough study of the local and regional socioeconomic dynamics which caused such incidents. The problem may be identified in Ottoman historical terminology, as the terms *şaki/eşkiya* were used to characterise anyone who found themselves outside the loop of sultanic legitimacy. Consequently, the terms *isyan*, *şakavet* and *fitne* were used to describe the activity of the above.

One thing is certain: those who found themselves branded as *şaki/eşkiya* were not beyond redemption or reconciliation - their condition was not terminal. This point was made by Jane Hathaway, who pointed out that out-of-favour Egyptian factions, denounced using the terms the *şaki/eşkiya*, were still thought of as being *within* a framework of legitimacy. Their branding as *şaki/eşkiya* was by no means the point of no return, as their “status could be reversed without unimaginable difficulty”.¹⁴ It would be hard to imagine these *eşkiya* as the type of bandits who preyed on travellers and led a life of robbery and crime. Despite the use of identical terminology,

Press, 1993). The centre-province administrative process has been also discussed in Anscombe, Frederick (ed.), *The Ottomans and the Balkans, 1750-1830* (Princeton: Weiner, 2006).

¹⁰ Brummett, “Classifying”, p. 94.

¹¹ Brummett, “Classifying”, pp. 93-4.

¹² Piterberg, Gabriel, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 136. On the impact of the modernisation theory on Ottomanist historians, see Quataert, “Ottoman history writing”, pp. 2-3.

¹³ On the Celali revolts see Finkel, Caroline, *Osman’s Dream: the Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2006), pp. 180-7; Griswold, William J., *The Great Anatolian Rebellion, 1000-1020/1591-1611* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983). Karen Barkey and also addresses the Celali revolts in Barkey, Karen, *Empire of Difference: the Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 178-81.

¹⁴ Hathaway, Jane, “Ottoman responses to Cerkes Mehmed Bey’s rebellion in Egypt, 1730”, in Hathaway, *Mutiny*, pp. 105-13, p. 109.

distinguishing between emerging notables who ‘crossed the line in the sand’, and soldiers who rebelled because their pay was late or the chain of supply failed them is essential. Add to these the presence of regional elites, competition and the occasional conflict which led to incidents of ‘rebellion’, and what we have is a spectrum of diverse cases and phenomena. The study of these provincial elites within their own micro-system has created a useful paradigm for the understanding of the social dynamic of Ottoman regions, particularly in the period of the *ayan*.¹⁵ When does a regional official become a rebel? What and where is the ‘line in the sand’?

Seventeenth-century Cyprus

In order to explain the situation in seventeenth-century Cyprus it is essential to read between the lines of historical narratives of the period. Essentially, this means attempting to understand the composition of elite groups on the island, their interests, the complex nature of relations between them, and their points of collaboration or conflict.

Cyprus in the late seventeenth century was a place of complex social and economic developments. The hundred years that had passed since the conquest of 1571 functioned as the furnace which smelted various social elements: those inherited from the Venetian presence and also introduced by the Ottomans. These processes resulted in an amalgam which was to last until at least the eighteenth century.¹⁶

Orthodox Christian higher clergymen and ambitious local notables sought to settle into their domain as Ottoman officials, and mark their turf. In that context, conflicts and power struggles were not unusual at all and must not be seen as an indication of either disorder or abnormality. Such conflicts, whether they escalated into outbursts of violent confrontation or fizzled out with the exchange of accusations and slander in the eyes of central authority, have to be considered to be an integral part of relations amongst power groups at that time.

Cyprus in the period between 1670 and 1687 was under the bureau (*kalem*) of the *kapudan paşa*,¹⁷ who in turn appointed a governor or *mütesellim* whose main duty was to ensure the collection and payment of taxes. The *mütesellim* arrived on the island armed with imperial orders and interacted with local officials in order to achieve maximum profit with minimum effort. At this point in the procedure pragmatism took over, and the *mütesellim* had to negotiate with local groups and people with influence if successful tax collection were to take place. It is in this period that the role of the Orthodox Christian higher clergy in tax collection becomes visible, and it continued to increase from that point onwards. With an already established network of communications and, more crucially, control, the Orthodox ecclesiastical structure became an invaluable asset for Ottoman administration.¹⁸ Its network of

¹⁵ See Antonis Anastasopoulos (ed.), *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire* (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Given, Michael and Hadjianastasis, Marios, “Landholding and landscape in Ottoman Cyprus”, in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 34-1 (2010), 38-60.

¹⁷ The common perception was that it was a *hass* of the *kapudan paşa* until 1703. However, Antonis Hadjikyriacou’s research has demonstrated that this was not the case. Hadjikyriacou, Antonis, “Society and Economy on an Ottoman Island: Cyprus in the Eighteenth Century”, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, SOAS, 2011, pp. 122-37; Alasya, Halil Fikret, *Kıbrıs Tarihi, M.E. 1450-M.S. 1878 ve Belli Başlı Antikitepleri* (Nicosia: Ahmet Mithat Akpınar, 1939), p. 69.

¹⁸ For example, Archbishop Ilarion Kigalas and other higher clergymen undertook the responsibility for the collection of the *bedel-i nüzüil* tax in 21 Safer 1088 (25 April 1677); Kuzey Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv, *Leşkoşa Sicil Defteri*, n. 5, p. 32, entry 1.

bishops and priests was undoubtedly a powerful tool for administration, one utilised by the Ottomans in a pragmatic realisation of mutual interest.¹⁹

The relatively loose grip central administration had on the control of Cyprus facilitated the emergence of local notables, but also contributed to the expansion of powers of local officials such as the *kadı* and the *ağa* of the Janissaries. European trade opportunities, especially the export of raw silk and cotton, drew local notables, clergymen and military men, who acquired land and expanded their holdings with a view to satisfying increasing demand for fabrics as well as for the raw materials. This led to the emergence of powerful figures, both Ottoman officials who used their influence to further their economic interests and also merchants who used their existing wealth to further their political influence and acquire posts in the local administration.

This two-way process of ‘Ottomanization’, the incorporation of local elites into the Ottoman structure but also the ‘naturalisation’ of Ottoman officials into local life, was most certainly observed in Cyprus.²⁰ Local social and political fermentations were facilitated further by the island’s ‘comfortable’ distance from the empire’s administrative centre. As an Ottoman province, Cyprus served primarily as a place of exile for undesirables. The centre’s main concern was the fiscal viability of the province, whose geographical position and productivity made it simultaneously of average importance (at best) in the eyes of the centre but extremely important for local entrepreneurs. In fact, the island’s often exaggerated strategic importance for the Ottomans lay more in the fact that it was not held by Venice rather than in its inclusion in the Sultan’s Protected Domains.²¹

Incorporation of local notables in the administration was widely practised throughout the Ottoman empire, and was invaluable to the central government, as it allowed it to achieve adequate and effective administration of its provinces without necessarily having to go to great lengths. Faroqhi stresses the importance of rural notables as people who “did not necessarily fit into the simple dichotomy of privileged state servitors and ordinary taxpayers [...]. Yet the Empire could not possibly be governed without them”.²²

Barkey states that these local groups were separately dependent on the state, which was “segmenting elites and common people”, forcing them to interact directly with the state but preventing them from interacting with each other. As far as Cyprus was concerned, this was simply not the case. The various elite groups were firmly intertwined with one another to such an extent that it is often difficult for the historian to distinguish the boundaries between groups and their interests. A glimpse into the

¹⁹ Hadjianastasis, Marios, “Bishops, Ağas and Dragomans: a Social and Economic History of Ottoman Cyprus, 1640-1704”, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2004, pp. 100-40.

²⁰ On provincial elites and ‘ottomanization’, see Canbakal, Hülya, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town: ‘Ayntāb in the 17th century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Khoury, Dina Rizk, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Bierman, Irene A., “The Ottomanization of Crete”, in *The Ottoman City and Its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order*, Irene A. Bierman, Rifa’at A. Abou-El-Haj and Donald Preziosi (eds), (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas 1991), pp. 53-75, and Toledano, Ehud R., “The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700-1900): A Framework for Research”, in *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within*, Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma’oz (eds), (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), pp. 145-162.

²¹ For a discussion of Cyprus’ ‘strategic position’, see Hadjikyriacou, “Society and Economy on an Ottoman Island”, pp. 73-97.

²² Faroqhi, Suraiya, “Coping with the central state, coping with local power: Ottoman regions and notables from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century”, in *The Ottomans and the Balkans: a discussion of historiography*, ed. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 351-82, 352.

Venetian archives reveals a network of personal relationships which is often lost in official Ottoman documentation.²³ Interactions between groups of interest and individuals were based on relationships built within administrative, professional, personal and family networks, all of which contributed to an intricate pattern. In addition, it is impossible to suggest a consistent model of collaboration or conflict among elite groups such as the Christian clergy, the military, local landowners and foreign merchants, as these relied heavily on personal activity rather than pre-defined patterns of behaviour prescribed by the concepts of institutions and organised groups. Barkey's idea of the state as omnipresent and in control of various facets of regional politics is overly idealistic; as we shall see below, the image of rigid interest groups which existed beyond individuals is simply not accurate. Interest groups and immediately identifiable social groups did not necessarily coincide.

However, Barkey is right in claiming that these regional elites did not rebel against the state, but rather agitated to be allowed to be a part of it. In Cyprus, power struggles and conflicts among local notables occurred in an attempt to gain a larger share, or even a local monopoly, of sultanic power on the island, rather than to oppose or overthrow it. These people were aiming to achieve the most they could feasibly attain *within* the system; they had no interest in opposing it. The Boyacıoğlu incident is emblematic of these processes.

The background to the Boyacıoğlu events

The period preceding Boyacıoğlu's emergence was dominated by unrest in the Janissary garrison and agitation which seems to have been caused by a variety, and often a combination, of factors. Taxation, collection and payments to local garrisons were a frequent cause for unrest. İbrahim Paşa, the island's *mütesellim*, was removed and executed in 1665, after a petition to the Porte. His successor, Derzi İbrahim Paşa, was also the target of a new complaint, but an investigation cleared him while it forced the islanders to pay the sum of 36,000 *guruş*.²⁴

Local garrisons often protested about delayed payments, and complaints by tax collectors claimed that they interfered with tax collection and prevented tax collectors from carrying out their duties. According to a petition by the Janissary leadership in 1675, the Janissaries of the island made excessive demands and oppressed their superiors.²⁵ In the same year, the Janissary leadership (*yeniçeri ocağın ihtiyarları*) petitioned against the *beylerbeyi* of Cyprus, Abdülkadir Paşa, claiming that he took some money from them in excess, without any legal claim or justification.²⁶ The *ağa* of the Janissaries, Ahmed Ağa, was also the target of a personal complaint by a person called Ahmed, who claimed that the *ağa* owed him 2,200 *guruş* from the

²³ The documents of the Archivio di Stato in Venice and the archives of the French consulate in Cyprus are explicit in the description of personal and professional relationships between European merchants and members of the Cypriot religious and administrative elite, Migliardi O'Riordan, Giustiniana (ed.), *Archivio del consolato veneto a Cipro (fine sec. XVII - inizio XIX)* (Venice: Archivio di Stato, 1993); Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, Anna, *Consulat de France à Larnaca 1660-1696 (tome I) documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire de Chypre* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1991).

²⁴ Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph von, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vol. VI (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1963), p. 152.

²⁵ Majer, Hans Georg, *Das Osmanische "registerbuch der beschwerden" (şikayet defteri) vom jahre 1675: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. mixt. 683* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), 3b (1).

²⁶ Majer, *Registerbuch*, 3b (2).

avariz money, which he refused to pay back.²⁷ In 1676, the local *ağas* obstructed the collection of the *cizye*, forcing the collector to petition the Porte.²⁸ Further problems arose in the following year: the collector of the *bedel-i nüzüil* for 1088/1677-78 petitioned the Porte, complaining that the local *ağas* of the Janissaries obstructed him in his collection of the tax.²⁹ In Muharrem 1090 (March of 1679) the Janissaries of the island obstructed the collection of the *bedel-i nüzüil* tax by appropriating excessive amounts for their salaries. After a petition to the Porte by the local *kadıs*, the Janissaries were ordered to stop interfering. The local *kadı* was ordered to report any further interference.³⁰

The frequency with which the island's Janissaries became embroiled in disputes, with a particular focus on tax collection and salary payments, points to the existence of a culture of interference and dependence on tax revenues beyond that ascribed by regulations. It may also point to an ongoing unresolved conflict within the administration of the island's revenues, which created grievances and led to petitions and complaints.

Taxation-related unrest inevitably involved the island's dragomans, who also performed fiscal functions. This period was marked by the emergence of powerful dragomans, such as Markos Koromilos, better known as Markoullis.³¹ Markoullis was only one of a long list of entrepreneurial Cypriots who combined official roles with economic activity in an attempt to accumulate wealth and power. His activity was immortalised in the 'Song of the Dragomans', which recounts his rise, fall from grace and eventual replacement by Dragoman Georgis (or Yorkis).³²

Markoullis emerged on the scene in the 1660s as a man engaged in trade and in contact with European merchants. He often took loans and bought fabrics on credit from Venetian or French merchants.³³ He was appointed to the post of *sarrağ*³⁴ by his patron, Dragoman 'Miser Antzulos'. After accusations of embezzlement he was called to Istanbul where he was imprisoned. Through the influence of his friends and in particular the dragoman of the imperial fleet, Panayiotis Nikousios,³⁵ he was released and went to Crete to meet the grand *vezir* Fazil Ahmed Köprülü, at the time engaged in the Cretan War. After Markoullis promised to repay the sums owed, offering fabrics as gifts,³⁶ the grand *vezir* appointed him dragoman of Cyprus. When he returned to Cyprus he reportedly began to oppress the populace, exacting excessive amounts in taxes and registering children and old men as tax-payers. He clashed with Archbishop Nikiforos, who sent a petition to the Porte asking for his removal. A

²⁷ Majer, *Registerbuch*, 38b (7).

²⁸ Kuzey Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv, *Lefkoşa Sicil Defteri*, n. 5, p. 76, entry 3.

²⁹ Kuzey Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv, *Lefkoşa Sicil Defteri*, n. 5, p. 83, entry 1.

³⁰ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, *Mühimme Defteri*, no. 96, p. 181 (20-30 Muharrem 1090/2-11 March 1679)

³¹ Sometimes also referred to as Okromilos, see Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 37-9, 78-81.

³² Papadopoulos, Theodoros (Theodore), "Το Ἄσμα των Διεμνηνέων" [The Song of the Dragomans], *Κυπριακαὶ Σπουδαί*, ME' [45] (1981), 55-141.

³³ Kuzey Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv, *Lefkoşa Sicil Defteri*, n. 5, p. 26, entry 2. This was a repayment of Markoullis's debt to Sauveur Marin, after the former's death in 1675.

³⁴ For the role of *sarrağ* see Saeed, Abdullah, "Şarrāf (a.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill, 2011. Brill Online, [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-8886], accessed 11 March 2011.

³⁵ Nikousios was a powerful and influential figure, see Detorakis, Theocharis, "Η Τουρκοκρατία στην Κρήτη (1669-1898) [Turkish rule in Crete (1669-1898)], in *Κρήτη: Ιστορία και πολιτισμός* [Crete: History and Culture], vol. II, ed. Nikolaos M. Panagiotakis (Iraklion: Syndesmos Topikon Enoseon Dimon & Koinotiton Kritis, 1988), pp. 335-436.

³⁶ The presence of fabrics further denotes his activity in this trade.

Cypriot merchant called Georgis, from the village of Lefkara, was preferred for dragoman, although Markoullis resisted his replacement bitterly with the two coming to blows in the house of Mehmed Ağa.³⁷ The two disputing dragomans went to Poland, where the army was campaigning, in order to resolve this issue with the Grand *Vezir*. Markoullis was finally sidelined and found himself exiled to the fortress of Famagusta,³⁸ where he was assassinated by the Janissaries soon after.³⁹

The Boyacıoğlu incident

Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu emerged in the early 1680s as a local *ağa*. He rose to prominence and became embroiled in power struggles with the other *ağas* of the island, which he managed to overpower. He became a *de facto* ruler of the island, controlling administration and taxation. He resisted a first attempt to bring him in line, in 1685/86, and he soon abused his powers, in his dealings with the French merchant community. By 1688/89 he was branded a *şaki*, and more decisive action was taken against him by the imperial centre. An armed conflict and a long pursuit ended in his capture and execution in 1690.

The most detailed account we have of the incident is the one recorded by Archimandrite Kyprianos in his history of Cyprus.⁴⁰ Kyprianos, writing almost a century after the events, had obtained his information from the French Consul Benoît Astier⁴¹ who had recorded it from two elderly Cypriots in 1764: a Muslim man 97 years of age and a Christian of a similar age who claimed to have been eye witnesses of the events.⁴² It is difficult to pinpoint exactly Mehmed Ağa Boyacıoğlu's origins. Kyprianos, a clergyman-cum-historian who published his *Ιστορία Χρονολογική* in 1788, traces Boyacıoğlu's emergence in the period after the island was included in the *kapudan paşa*'s bureau circa 1670. According to Kyprianos, after the administrative change of 1670, the island's local *ağas* became increasingly involved in the administration and tax collection in particular.

This being the situation, the *ağas* of the land, becoming more powerful because of wealth, honour and supporters in the capital, they attempted to obtain and received the supervision of these revenues either from the *kapudan paşa*, or even from Constantinople itself, and they either farmed them out or collected them in collaboration, they appeared as the rulers and masters of the island themselves.⁴³

³⁷ Possibly Boyacıoğlu.

³⁸ Papadopoulos, "Άσμα", 55-141.

³⁹ The report of the French consul Balthazar Sauvan leaves no margin for doubt concerning Markoullis's death: "il fut assassiné par les geissaires de l'isle", Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, p. 115.

⁴⁰ Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 310.

⁴¹ André-Benoît Astier was born in Aix-en-Provence in 1719 and served in Cyprus as consul of France from 1755 until his death in 1803. His wife was the widow of Consul Giovanni Carmogliese of Ragusa, see Anne Mézin, *Les consuls de France au siècle des lumières (1715-1792)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1997), p. 107.

⁴² Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 310. It would perhaps be prudent to express some reservation as to the validity of Astier's sources, as the motif of very old men, eye witnesses lending credibility to a recorded story, is far from uncommon.

⁴³ "Ούτως εχόντων των πραγμάτων, οι αγάδες του τόπου ενδυναμωθέντες, και από πλούτον και από τιμήν, και από υπερασπιστάς εις Βασιλεύουσαν, επροσπάθουν και ελάμβανον την επιστασίαν αυτήν των εισοδημάτων ή από τον Καπετάν Πασάν, είτε και από Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, και ή επάκτων αυτά, ή και τα εσύναζαν επιτροπικώς, εφαινοντο ως εξουσιασταί τότε της Νήσου και Αυθένται οι αυτοί", Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 309.

The statement that the island's *ağas* “appeared as the rulers and masters of the island” suggests that the Cypriot elite had begun to gain in power. Although Kyprianos's wording perhaps shows his disapproval, this may be interpreted as a mutually beneficial arrangement between the central authority and the province. Hindsight allowed Kyprianos to castigate the emergence of the *ağas*, but one wonders whether this arrangement came into existence as a result of convenience rather than weakness on the part of the state. Kyprianos leaves no doubt as to the ‘outcome’ of this arrangement. According to his *History*, the island's *ağas* subsequently became “embroiled in rivalry and enmity with each other” (ήλθον εις αντιζηλίαν προς αλλήλους και έχθρας) and “armed themselves and clashed” (αρματώθησαν εν τω αναμεταξύ των και συνελαύνοντο) in a struggle for power in which Boyacıoğlu, after a stint in prison in Famagusta in 1683,⁴⁴ prevailed and went on to ‘rule’ the island for a period of between five and seven years, until 1690. Boyacıoğlu appointed his own people to all the *kazas* who “governed, judged and supervised”.⁴⁵

Here Kyprianos makes a statement which appears contradictory and perhaps suggestive of pre-existing conditions: during his seven-year rule, Boyacıoğlu carried on paying the *cizye* tax annually to the *cizyedar* appointed by the Porte.⁴⁶ Kyprianos states that “in the past, those appointed asked for this tax and kept it for themselves”.⁴⁷ Does Kyprianos suggest that during Boyacıoğlu's time in power the taxes were paid more efficiently than before, or that there was more corruption before? We do know from the documentation that there was a certain degree of agitation in the local garrison regarding salary payments and tax collection. Unfortunately, Kyprianos failed to expand on this, and we must be careful not to attribute more importance to his choice of words than may be appropriate.

In terms of Boyacıoğlu's origins, Kyprianos is the only historian who makes mention of the emergence of Boyacıoğlu and the *ağas*' power struggle. Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa⁴⁸ describes events leading up to 1102/1690/91, giving an account of events from the beginning of Boyacıoğlu's rebellion. His supporters came from the whole prism of the Cypriot military elite: janissaries, *zaims* and *sipahis*.⁴⁹ This group overpowered and killed many officials who opposed them (*ağas* and *alaybeys*) and drove away the appointed tax collectors, the *mütesellims* (“birkaç ağaların ve alay beyilerin katl ve mütesellimlerin kaçırup”).⁵⁰

When ‘news’ of Boyacıoğlu's activity reached the Porte, Çolak Mehmed Paşa was dispatched with troops to restore order. Kyprianos and Raşid agree that Çolak Mehmed Paşa was overpowered after only a few months on the island, and found

⁴⁴ “se trouvant pour lors prisonnier a Famagousté”, Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 156-8.

⁴⁵ “οἱτινες ἐδιοικοῦσον, ἐκρίνον καὶ ἐπιστάτευον”, Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 310.

⁴⁶ Kyprianos makes reference to the *haraç* (χαράτσιον), a word widely used to describe the *cizye*.

⁴⁷ “δίδωντας τον καθέκαστον χρόνον, του απεσταλμένου από την Πόρταν χαράτση το διατεταγμένον χαράτσιον, του οποίου πρότερον εσυνήθιζαν να είναι ζητηταί, οι απεσταλμένοι εκείνοι, και το εβάσταζαν δια λόγου τους”, Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 310.

⁴⁸ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde-i Vekayiât*, ed Abdülkadir Özcan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1995). On Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa see Kafadar, Cemal, Hakan Karateke and Cornell Fleischer, “Mehmed Paşa” in *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, [online resource, 2008 http://www.ottomanhistorians.com/database/html/defterdarmehmed_en.html] accessed on 15 June 2011.

⁴⁹ “cezire-i Kıbrıs’ın yerlü yeniçerileri firkalarından ve zu’ama ve erbab-ı timarından ba’z-i şakiler”, Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 390.

⁵⁰ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 391. A third historian, Mehmed Raşid, only deals with events after Boyacıoğlu was declared an apostate and action was taken against him, Mehmed Raşid, *Tarih-i Raşid*, vol. I (Istanbul: İbrahim Müteferrika, A.H. 1153), pp. 159b-160a.

himself restricted to the Kubatoğlu çiftlik.⁵¹ However, Sarı Mehmed Paşa claims that it was in fact a certain ‘Frenk’ Mehmed Bey⁵² who was sent to the island, where he killed many of the rebels and severely reproached the notables (*ayan*) for their support. Soon after, however, Mehmed Bey was killed in 1097/1685/86 and once again the rebels gained control over the island, causing a delegation of *ulema* to go to Istanbul and protest at the Porte. In all three histories the first attempt to restore order is reported to have failed, prompting the dispatch of new troops to the island.

Çifutoğlu Ahmed Paşa⁵³ was ordered to the island to eliminate the rebels.⁵⁴ He disembarked in Akanthou, on the island’s northern coast, and headed straight to Kythrea⁵⁵ where he seized the flour mills in order to cut off the supplies to the rebels who were barricaded in Nicosia. He stayed there for two months, ensuring that the rebels did not have any access to supplies from outside the walls of the city. The city was without bread when Ahmed Paşa, who was in the meantime joined by Çolak Mehmed Paşa, promised Boyacıoğlu safe passage. Boyacıoğlu left the city with his supporters at night, going first to Lefkara, and from there to Lefka, where 28 of his men were killed and another 32 captured by Ahmed Paşa’s *kâhya* (Κεχαγιάς).⁵⁶ From Lefka he went to Kykkos, where he was able to regroup and fend off the pursuing troops. He continued to Pafos and afterwards to Kyrenia, where he caught and hanged a spy of the Paşa from a tree opposite the castle. With the Paşa relentlessly pursuing him, he attempted to enter Famagusta, hoping to barricade himself within the walls.⁵⁷ The gates there were already sealed and his troops were scattered by the Paşa. Boyacıoğlu and six other men went to Pyla and Larnaca, and while trying to get to Limassol, were captured in Koilani. The Paşa brought them to Nicosia where, according to Kyprianos, he hanged Boyacıoğlu at night. His body was on display the following day, when the rest of his companions were “hanged alive from hooks through their jaws” (εκρεμάζοντο ζώντες, επι των γάντζων από των ανθερεώνων).

It may be useful to explore the possibility of symbolism in the methods of execution, and what these acts of punishment reveal not only as the messages intended for any current or potential rebels, but also in terms of the ‘hierarchy’ of executed rebels. Boyacıoğlu’s hanging by night may point to a need to dispose of him before his companions managed to rally support. In addition, the fact that he was hanged rather than tortured with his companions may indicate a certain respect for his status, which his ganged comrades were not deemed to deserve. Their painful end

⁵¹ The Kubatoğlu name appears again in the eighteenth century, when we have reference to “Alay bey Mustafa Kubatoğlu” as responsible for collecting the fine from the Muslims of Cyprus after the Cil Osman incidents of 1764, Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 321.

⁵² He was perhaps a renegade.

⁵³ Referred to as Halebli Ahmed Paşa by Raşid, *Tarih*, 159b-160a; Sarı Mehmed Paşa refers to Ahmed Paşa as “muhasıl of Aydın and Saruhan, Halebli Ahmed Paşa, also known as Cühudoğlu”, *Zübde*, p. 391.

⁵⁴ He was also ordered to send the former *beylerbeyi* of Cyprus Mehmed Paşa as a prisoner to the Porte, after he was imprisoned and his property confiscated for debts to the Treasury; Şakar, Muzaffer Fehmi, *1101/1102 (1690/1691) Tarihli 100 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri* (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2007), p. 127, order no. 259 (no date-presumably Muharrem 1102/October/November 1690).

⁵⁵ Known as Değirmenlik in Turkish.

⁵⁶ Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 311.

⁵⁷ The *alay bey* of Famagusta, Hasan, was accused of assisting the ‘bandits’ and was ordered to be expelled from the island, should the accusations prove true; Şakar, *100 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, p. 66, order no. 242 (10-19 Muharrem 1102/13-22 October 1690).

also suggests that Ahmed Paşa wanted to send a clear message to any supporters they might have had.⁵⁸

With this bloody conclusion, the Boyacıoğlu incident came to an end⁵⁹, but it was not the end of turmoil by any stretch of the imagination. Ahmed Paşa, named *beylerbeyi* of Cyprus, was soon accused of serious transgressions, namely killing innocent people who had little to do with Boyacıoğlu and seizing their property, forcibly collecting eight to nine *guruş* per person for the *cizye*, and imposing many fines despite orders against such actions. In January of 1691, an order was issued for the appointment of a *kapıcıbaşı* as investigator who was ordered to examine the situation and report to the Porte.⁶⁰ The process resulted in the conviction and execution of Ahmed Paşa, which Sarı Mehmed Paşa attributed to “the island’s climate and the will of God, which makes villainy part of the disposition of the island’s inhabitants”.⁶¹

So who was Mehmed Boyacıoğlu? What was he? Kyprianos calls him an “apostate” (αποστάτης) who “shed the veil of submission” (έρριψε το κάλυμμα της υποταγής).⁶² From other sources we find out more information about him. He was a typical Ottoman official of Cyprus, just like Markoullis, in that his activities went beyond his official capacity. These include extensive trade and financial transactions with the foreign merchants of Larnaca and show him to be engaged in business with the French community there.

Sauveur Marin, a French merchant who also had dealings with Markoullis, had lent Boyacıoğlu money.⁶³ In 1687, Marin wrote to Balthazar Sauvan, the consul on the island, claiming that some armed Janissaries from Boyacıoğlu’s group had entered Marin’s house and threatened him, demanding that he hand over a *tezkere* and a *hüccet* which had been drawn up in 1684, and which concerned the amount of 1,060 *guruş* which Boyacıoğlu’s wife and mother-in-law owed Marin.⁶⁴ After a series of threats, the French community saw to it that Marin gave the documents to Boyacıoğlu

⁵⁸ However, we must be very careful with any further conclusions, as Kyprianos’s account may simply reflect a perception and a degree of sensationalisation, rather than fact. On the method of execution, Sandys describes ganching as “to be let fall from on high upon hooks, and there to hang until they die by the anguish of these wounds or more miserable famine”, Sandys, George, *Sandys Travels: Containing an History of the Original and Present State of the Turkish Empire* (London: John Williams Junior, 1673), p. 49. On capital punishment see Heyd, Uriel, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, ed. V.L. Menage (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) and Bosworth, C.E., I.R. Netton, I.R., F.E. Vogel, F.E., “Siyasa”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman (Brill, 2010) (Brill Online, University of Birmingham, 05 March 2010).

⁵⁹ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, pp. 391-2; Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, pp. 310-11. It must be pointed out that Boyacıoğlu’s flight through all the locations Kyprianos mentions (see Fig. 1) and his eventual capture in Koilani, a place which may inform Sarı Mehmed’s description of a “bir teng ve dik mahalde” (a narrow and steep place), would have taken weeks of pursuit, something which may well have brought considerable turmoil to those communities forced to accommodate Mehmed Ağa and his following.

⁶⁰ Şakar, *100 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, p.244-5, order no. 509 (1-9 Cemaziyelahir 1102/1-9 March 1691).

⁶¹ “cezîre-i mezbûrenin âb u havâsı iktizâsiyle emr-i Hakk ile ahâlîsinin cibilliyetlerinde merkûz olan şakâvet”, Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 392.

⁶² Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, p. 310. Kyprianos’s word of choice may derive from his own religious office, or may denote that loyalty to the sultan was non-negotiable, akin to religious affiliation.

⁶³ On Sauveur Marin see Laurent d’Arvieux, *Mémoires du chevalier d’Arvieux*, vol. V (Paris: C. J. B. Delespine, 1735), pp. 485-8.

⁶⁴ The debt had been owed to Marin by the late Mehmed Ağa ‘Ermenoulou’, Boyacıoğlu’s father-in-law, Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 156-8.

out of fear that he would carry out his threats.⁶⁵ The consul protested on the matter to Pierre Girardin, ambassador of France to the Porte, who petitioned the Porte and in June 1688 obtained an order to Boyacıoğlu to pay Marin the owed amount of 1,060 *guruş*.⁶⁶ On 1 December 1688, a French deputy of *la nation française*, Louis Martin, visited Marin's house and described how Boyacıoğlu had attacked it at ten o'clock the previous night, searching for Marin in order to kill him, as he had not received some fabrics he had demanded as a present.⁶⁷

In addition to Boyacıoğlu's business interests with the French, Kyprianos insinuates a romantic involvement with a lady from the French 'SA' household,⁶⁸ where Boyacıoğlu spent some time as a 'guest'. French reports indicate that he forced himself on his hosts ("s'est logé par force chez le Sieur de St Amand").⁶⁹ This was the house of Saint-Amand, another member of the French community, and it was there that a strange encounter, as described in detail by Ariel Salzmann, took place. The incident involved Boyacıoğlu, Sauvan and Fra Alfonso Moscati of Malta, a renegade pilgrim who had been wandering the area in search of salvation. Alfonso threw himself at Boyacıoğlu's feet, wanting to become Muslim once again, and "hoisted his habit to display his circumcision".⁷⁰ Boyacıoğlu overlooked the matter, as he was more concerned with bringing the French community to accept his terms. This incident happened in March 1690, not long before Boyacıoğlu's demise. In July 1690, it was reported that "the new Paşa of the island"⁷¹ pursued the rebels and killed 200 of them".⁷²

It is important to distinguish fact from myth here. As one would expect, the Ottoman historians and archival sources⁷³ characterised Boyacıoğlu as a bandit (*şakî*) and a rebel, and the whole incident as a rebellion (*fitne*),⁷⁴ sedition (*fesad*) and villainy (*şakavet*).⁷⁵ These expressions are common in Ottoman historical writing (and imperial terminology) and must be approached with caution. As Piterberg has observed, these terms were applied retrospectively. Just as Abaza Mehmed Paşa was retrospectively branded an *asi* (rebel), so has Boyacıoğlu been branded a villain and bandit by Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa and Mehmed Raşid in their renditions of the story.⁷⁶ Kyprianos makes the contradictory statement that Boyacıoğlu "shed the veil of submission", while continuing tax payments to imperial tax collectors. However, in his choice of words, Kyprianos makes a clear distinction between the nature of the Boyacıoğlu incident and Halil Ağa's rebellion in 1765, an event about which he most

⁶⁵ Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 139-42.

⁶⁶ Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 152-4; for more information on Pierre Girardin see Comte de Saint-Priest (François-Emmanuel Guignard), *Mémoires sur l'ambassade de France en Turquie et sur le commerce des Français dans le Levant* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1877).

⁶⁷ Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 159-62.

⁶⁸ Written in Latin characters in the Greek text, *Ιστορία*, p. 311. Kyprianos or his informer probably kept the full name to themselves in order to protect the family's honour.

⁶⁹ Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, p. 140.

⁷⁰ Salzmann, Ariel, "A Travelogue Manqué? The Accidental Itinerary of a Maltese Priest in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean" in *A Faithful Sea, The Religious Culture of the Mediterranean, 1200-1700*, Adnan A. Husain and K. E. Fleming (eds) (London: One World, 2007), pp. 141-72.

⁷¹ Ahmed Paşa.

⁷² Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 168-9.

⁷³ "Bundan akdem Kıbrıs cezâresinde fesâd u şekâvetiyle meşhûr olan Boyacıoğlu nâm şakî", Şakar, *100 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, p. 244-5, order no. 509 (1-9 Cemaziyelahir 1102/1-9 March 1691).

⁷⁴ Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa, *Zübde*, p. 390.

⁷⁵ Raşid, *Tarih*, p. 159b.

⁷⁶ Piterberg, Gabriel, "The alleged rebellion of Abaza Mehmed Paşa: historiography and the Ottoman state in the seventeenth century", in Hathaway, *Mutiny*, pp. 14-24, 16.

likely had more direct information.⁷⁷ Whereas Boyacıoğlu merely attempted to extend his powers and monopolise state authority on the island, Halil Ağa openly led a rebellion against the state and its local representatives. Kyprianos repeatedly uses the term *zorba* (ζορπάς, rebel) to describe Halil Ağa, which may indicate that he perceived it to convey exactly that: the open rebellion against sultan authority, something which Boyacıoğlu never demonstrated.

It is clear that the use of the term ‘rebellion’ can only serve to disguise the social and political conditions of the period. Boyacıoğlu emerged from the same conditions which produced Markoullis, and in many ways the two individuals’ activities follow the same pattern of networking, wealth, power and abuse thereof. When did Mehmed Ağa become Mehmed *şaki*? How did the process of transformation work and at what exact point in his trajectory, if ever, was he beyond any hope of legitimisation? ‘Rebellion’ implies dissent, such as may be expressed as a result of grievance – much like a Janissary rebellion caused by delayed payments or debased coinage. As such, from the vantage point of the rebels, it was a measure of last resort to force the Ottoman state to engage in a dialogue with them – and a huge gamble. It is a loaded term which is not useful in explaining a historical process which lasted a minimum of five years, during which Boyacıoğlu was still integrated, albeit sporadically, into the state mechanism.

Boyacıoğlu’s integration in the system is further compounded by studying the details of the action against him. The two military attempts at suppressing him and his supporters – who were by no means a bunch of roving bandits raiding villages – were undertaken within a space of five years. The first attempt, that of Çolak Mehmed Paşa, took place in 1685/86, while we know that Çifutoğlu Ahmed Paşa killed Boyacıoğlu and his men in 1690. This delay in decisive action betrays a number of things: apart from the occasional harassment of members of the French community, there was little else of which Boyacıoğlu could be accused. Oppression of the populace, over-taxation and rapacity were all accusations liberally levelled at officials by their rivals or other social groups whose interests they threatened. Yet these accusations were never levelled at Boyacıoğlu. The terms *zûlm u ta’addi* (oppression and transgression) are not mentioned in any of the texts or state correspondence. There is little evidence so far to suggest that his activity had a measurable impact on the peasantry.⁷⁸ This is not to suggest that the latter were undisturbed, but rather to point out that all indications point towards the continuation of normal everyday life.

If Kyprianos’s account is to be trusted, we must assume that during this five-year rule Boyacıoğlu collected and paid taxes to tax collectors and appointed his men to “rule, judge and supervise” all over the island. The fact that an imperial order was sent to Boyacıoğlu in 1688, ordering him to honour his debt to Sauveur Marin, shows that Boyacıoğlu was still considered to be within a legal framework which allowed the central authority to expect him to comply with such an order. Had Boyacıoğlu been a true rebel treading outside legal boundaries, there would have been no point in attempting to make him conform to the law. Although it had been established that his activity did not exactly fit within the ‘ideal’ for the administration of the island, it was

⁷⁷ Kyprianos, *Ιστορία*, pp. 320-4; Hill, George, *A History of Cyprus, Vol. IV, The Ottoman Province, the British Colony, 1571-1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 80-7. Halil Ağa’s rebellion came as a reaction to the imposition of fines, a result of the 1764 disturbances which resulted in the death of the *muhassil*, Cil Osman, see Kitromilides, Paschalis, “Repression and protest in traditional society: Cyprus 1764”, *Kypriakai Spoudai*, 46 (1982), 91-101, cited in Hadjikyriacou, “Society and Economy on an Ottoman Island”, pp. 24, 144-7

⁷⁸ Stavridis also makes this point, “Αποστασία”, p. 143.

somehow *de facto* accepted up to the point where he was indeed declared a bandit. It must also be pointed out, however, that this period coincided with a Janissary revolt and the deposition of Mehmed IV⁷⁹, something which undoubtedly restricted the Porte's attention to more pressing matters than the annoying, if persistent, presence of an over-ambitious official in Cyprus.

It seems that the point at which Boyacıoğlu and his men crossed the line in the sand appeared as a result of the protracted pressure he exerted on the French community, and their frequent reports to the ambassador in Istanbul, from 1687 onwards one Pierre Girardin. Girardin's protestations to the Sultan would no doubt have caused Süleyman II and the grand *vezir* considerable irritation and perhaps embarrassment in relation to a European partner whose community members were supposed to be protected under treaties. The mention of Boyacıoğlu's involvement (or suggested involvement) with the lady of Saint-Amand may have served to discredit and undermine him further, by questioning the moral fibre of a man who would dishonour his hosts in such a manner. Alternatively, it may simply have been a romantic involvement disapproved of by the Saint-Amand family and discouraged in support of their interests. It must be assumed that, despite the generally good treatment of French merchants⁸⁰, Boyacıoğlu reached the point of no return in his harassment of Marin, which was seen as an affront to the whole community and a violation of existing treaties between the two nations.

What Boyacıoğlu's example and the response of the Porte imply is that a regional official in a province such as Cyprus could potentially interpret his remit liberally, as long as a semblance of legality and stability was maintained. Power struggles and the subsequent concentration of power and redistribution of sultanic authority did not necessarily prompt an urgent response from the centre. Despite Boyacıoğlu's stranglehold on power in Cyprus, the Porte did not seem to mind very much, as long as there was a degree of order and the taxes were paid. One may suspect that the first attempt at suppressing him was nothing more than a slap on the wrist, in the hope that strong censure and the presence of an official with considerably more authority (Çolak Mehmed Paşa) would be enough to restore order. It is unlikely that Çolak Mehmed Paşa arrived at the island with a large number of troops, since he was overpowered by Boyacıoğlu and his supporters. His mission was simply to bring Boyacıoğlu to order and ensure there was no possibility for further disturbance. The Porte and Çolak Mehmed Paşa possibly underestimated the extent of Boyacıoğlu's power and support.

Rebellion, revolt, *şakavet*, *fitne* or something else?

What this analysis has shown is that whatever Boyacıoğlu did it was neither rebellion nor revolt, at least in an exclusive fashion. He did not raise the banner of rebellion against central authority. He clearly did not lead a peasant rebellion against their

⁷⁹ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, pp. 292-8. This period also coincided with a Janissary rebellion in Crete, Sariyannis, M., "Rebellious janissaries: two military mutinies in Candia (1688, 1762) and their aftermaths", in *The Eastern Mediterranean Under Ottoman Rule: Crete, 1645-1840*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2008), pp. 255-74.

⁸⁰ As far as other merchants were concerned, despite some damage as a result of the situation, trade went on as normal, and the French, apart from Marin, were well treated on the whole ("nous sommes tres bien traités, Dieu mercy"), Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 163-4. It is also worth pointing out that Marin and the consul Balthasar Sauvan had been embroiled in bitter dispute during the late 1670s, something which may have influenced the manner and urgency with which the incident was reported in protest to the ambassador in Istanbul, Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou, *Consulat*, pp. 82-6.

landowners or tax collectors. He most certainly did not rebel in demand of his salary, nor did he lurk in the mountains robbing unsuspecting travellers of their wealth. What he did do was to test the boundaries of legality in order to reinforce his position as the main exponent of legitimacy and power on the island. Boyacıoğlu aimed to operate in the grey area located between the confines of the law and the relative freedom afforded by the distance between the province and Istanbul. This was a dangerous and delicate balancing act, one in which he succeeded for a number of years, but which ultimately led to his downfall. It is simply baffling that we are unable to define this phenomenon outside the limitations of anti-establishment or anti-authority terminology.

Was this a breakdown of state control? Perhaps it was, but only after 1688, when imperial orders were ignored. But state control surely existed up to that point, albeit not in the manner the central authority – or idealistic historians – would have preferred. I doubt whether it is absolutely necessary to brand Boyacıoğlu with any label at all, other than that of the enthusiastic, if ultimately crushed, political funambulist. The terms used so far to describe this phenomenon are rather inadequate, and as such restrict understanding of the origins and various phases in Boyacıoğlu's journey from *ağa* to *şaki*. This can only lead to disregard of the underlying long-term social and economic conditions which incubated the various Markoullises and Boyacıoğlus of Cypriot history.

Boyacıoğlu's (and Markoullis's before him) rise to power shows that in late-seventeenth-century members of the Cyprus elite found considerable space in which to develop their networks and interpret their roles in a flexible (and expansive) manner. This phenomenon, previously attributed to that milder expression of decline and decentralisation, was recently reviewed by historians in favour of a less negative approach. Piterberg suggests that decentralisation is “a nicer way of saying [...] decline”⁸¹, where the state should ‘ideally’ be in complete control and all deviations from this model contribute to the decline.

It is simply not enough to attribute social fermentation and tensions to the lack of state control. What happened in late-seventeenth-century Cyprus was not loss of control. It was a re-negotiation of the relationship between the centre and the periphery, where the incorporation of regional officials in the management of the provinces gathered momentum. This was also observed by Salzmann, who developed the idea of “centripetal decentralization”, whereby the state's authority is not undermined by the process of decentralisation, but rather maintained through a series of “discrete but interlocking institutions in which the state's coercive and administrative means were redeployed”.⁸² Within this framework, it is clear to see that the state negotiated with regional officials and groups in an attempt to integrate these and maintain control and fiscal efficiency. This did not necessarily mean the weakening of the state's control, as the system could be efficient and functional without the state having to be omnipresent.

⁸¹ Piterberg, *Ottoman Tragedy*, p. 154.

⁸² Ariel Salzmann, “An ancient regime revisited: privatization and political economy in the eighteenth-century Ottoman empire”, *Politics & Society*, 21/4 (1993), 393-423, 395.

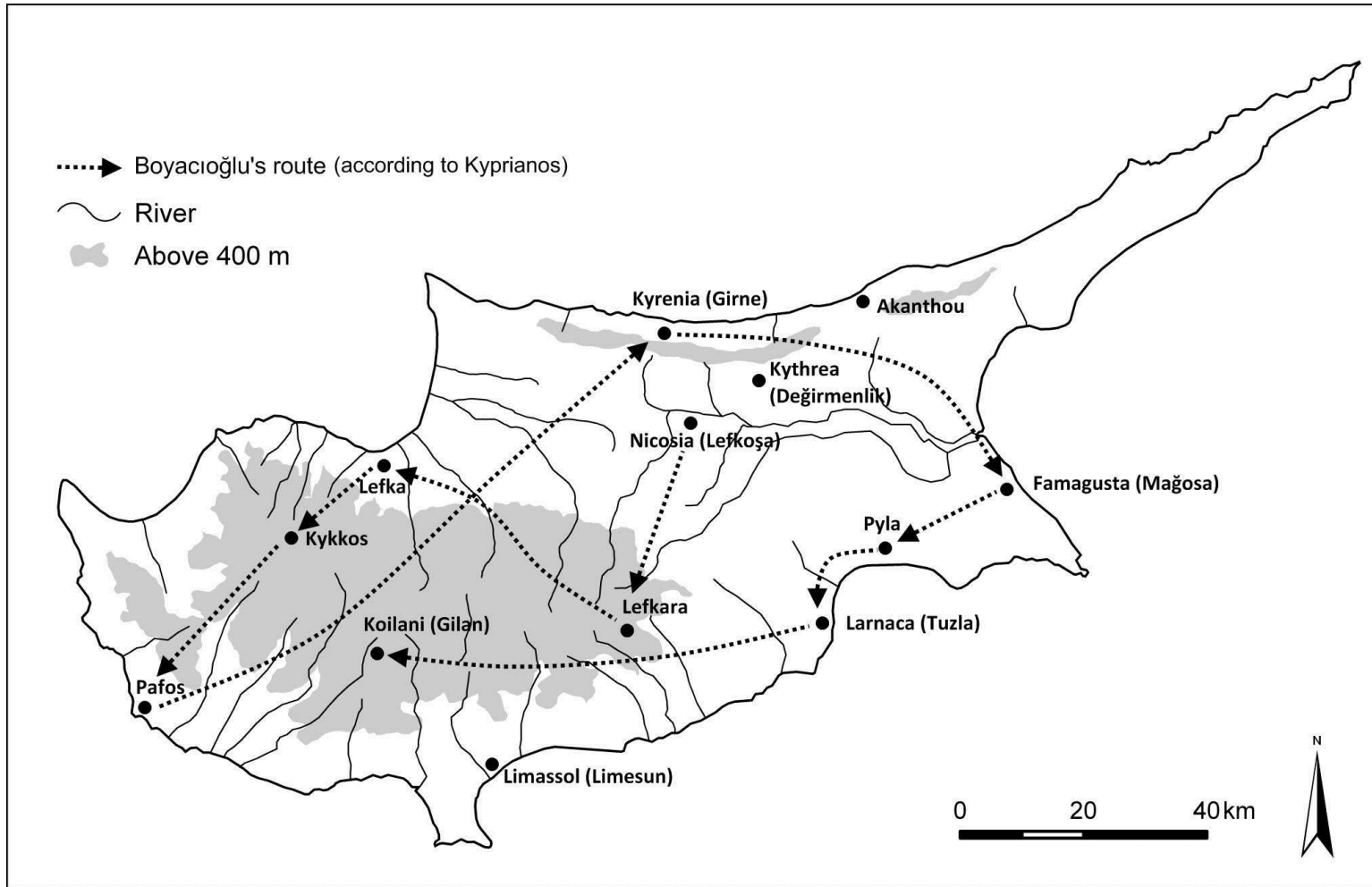


Fig. 1. Map of Cyprus of Boyacioğlu's flight in 1690